

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

25 November 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comment Relating to San Salvador 326, 23 November.

1. El Salvador has long been overdue for fundamental social and political reform. In essence, the question is whether such reform will come eventually by a Castro-type or a Betancourt-type revolution.
2. Lemus, as president, alienated the military and the "fourteen families" by not repressing with sufficient vigor increasingly radical tendencies among the intellectuals and the general population, which had Castroist overtones. At the same time the radical reformers regarded him as an obstacle to progress.
3. Osorio almost certainly organized the coup which overthrew Lemus. Military participation was prerequisite. Osorio also included leftist civilian elements, presumably in order to gain popular acceptance of the interim regime and to deprive the Castroists

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of a ground for opposition. The Junta, however, has appointed to office so many persons with Communist and Castroist associations as to raise a question whether Osorio has lost control of the situation to the Castroists. This is the crux of the problem.

4. In the discussions reported in San Salvador 326 the Junta and Osorio profess to be following a Betancourt-type rather than a Castro-type course. This is the expedient line for them to take in seeking US recognition, which would tend to secure their position against a possible rightist coup, and is therefore not conclusive as to their real intentions.

5. Even assuming Osorio's good faith and continued predominant influence, recognition, if granted, would have to be followed up by acceptance of an support for radical social reform in El Salvador in order to retain the continued good will of the new regime.

6. Denial of recognition keeps open the possibility of a rightist counter-coup. For this reason, the present Junta might modify its conduct in order to obtain recognition, but it would remain resentful of the necessity after recognition had been obtained. If convinced that US recognition was not obtainable, it would probably turn to Castro for needed support.

- 2 -

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7. If the present Junta were overthrown by a rightist military coup, the US would be considered to be responsible in El Salvador and throughout Latin America. This would be said to document the alleged US preference for military dictatorship and opposition to democratic reform. Moreover, a rightist military regime would probably have a hard time repressing increasingly violent popular resistance, which would have Cuban support.

8. On balance, we believe that support for Osorio is the best course as long as he has any chance of keeping or regaining control of the situation.

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